

View From The Islands: September 2011

By Bruce Fraser

Three Rescues

Amid the cacophony of the roaring rooster tail and the covertly local un-muffled boat (you know, the one that replaces the RCMP inflatable when the afternoon shift is off the lake) there are a few quiet moments to think about the nature of our society. Over the last few weeks I have witnessed three rescues that illustrate the range of civility that our fresh water mariners exhibit under pressure.

Rescue One: Man Overboard

Criss-crossing the lake, a middle-aged man was recapturing his youthful innocence in a laser-like sailboat. A gust of wind capsized him, sail flat on the water, leaving him swimming about the boat wondering just how much youth he had left. A nearby powerboat, inevitably towing the screaming denizens of a float tube, quickly stopped to help. An athletic actual youth jumped out of the powerboat, clambered on the outstretched keel and had the sailboat righted in a minute. A wet, but undaunted sailor was under way again and the tube tower resumed its sinuous wave-making for the impatient kids. It was a nice lesson for them on how to respond to “those in peril on the sea”.

Rescue Two: Broken Engine

A boatful of teens approached Cliffside under tow. The derelict was shepherded to the wharf and enough passengers to fill a circus Volkswagen disembarked, with a couple more from the towboat. It was no surprise that the engine had quit, probably being exhausted from carrying the entire population of Shawnigan Village. As the tow-rope was cast off there was a round of profuse thanks from the stranded boaters and one grateful young man held out his hand with a few bills in compensation for the gas used by the rescuer. It was, of course, refused with the comment “Hey, I’ve been there myself, glad to do it.” It was a “Jack Layton moment”!

Rescue Three: On the Rocks

I noticed a boatful of revelers, complete with boom box and beer cans making for the shallows. Long before they could have been waved off, had anyone been watching, they plowed into the rocks with a resounding thump. This of course happened on the wrong side of the green marker buoy but it looked like water to them. (I might have been able to warn them, but I was skinny dipping at the time and jumping and yelling to get their attention risked arrest for indecent exposure) There was no engine noise, a swimmer waded around looking at the leg, while incredulous questions from the gaggle of girls aboard wafted over the water. A dog barked excitedly, responding to the angst of its owner. What ensued was a resounding series of “F-bombs”, aimed at first at the innocent dog, and an oft-repeated lament over the “forty thousand bucks” invested in the boat. There was no mention of the cost of the boating certificate. A few cell phone calls later a small skiff appeared to take the broken inboard under-tow. It could not make any headway in the wind, so a larger inboard finally appeared and the dead vessel slowly made it’s way down the lake, F-bombs fading into the distance as the boom box proved to be still magnificently functional. Rescue was had, but was it deserved?

The last incident has an ironic twist. Knowing full well how few people driving large boats actually understand the buoyage system, I had put a marker buoy on the edge of the shallows to warn those not familiar with the lake. A few days earlier, two young boys in kayaks had appropriated the float. They were seen, but when confronted, stoutly denied taking the float, a wide-eyed lie delivered with astonishing poise. I told them that they were putting people in danger but their sassy response was “people can see it’s shallow anyway”. Yes boys, they could if they were watching and “forty thousand bucks” later you can be relieved that nobody was hurt, this time.